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INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L LUSAKA 000987

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S LAYLWARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KCOR](#) [ZA](#)

SUBJECT: VICE PRESIDENT KUNDA - BANDA'S GO-TO FALL GUY?

REF: A. LUSAKA 654

[B](#). LUSAKA 684

[C](#). LUSAKA 985

[D](#). 08 LUSAKA 1183

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Michael Koplovsky for reasons 1.
4 (b,d)

[1](#). (C) Zambian Vice President George Kunda has become a strident and confrontational voice in the Banda Cabinet. Over the last few months, he has announced the GRZ decision not to appeal former President Frederick Chiluba's acquittal (ref A), levied accusations on and threatened local diplomats (ref B), and most recently, unveiled his own draconian, oppressive media regulation bill (ref C). On two of these occasions (but unfortunately not on the Chiluba appeal), Kunda's government colleagues subsequently retreated from these forward-leaning positions, climbing down. President Banda may be putting Kunda up to these stunts -- letting a loyal (but expendable) deputy take the flack as he floats aggressive and risky trial balloons, or Kunda may be flying solo without an approved flight plan. In either case, despite his participation in discussion among hard-line Banda confidants like the Ministers of Information, Home Affairs, and Public Works, Kunda is doubtful calling the shots or hatching schemes. A doleful Bassett hound has unexpectedly emerged as a clumsy pit-bull in the Banda administration.

[2](#). (C) During a December 21 radio interview, Kunda attacked the press, civil society and political opposition for carrying out "a calculated scheme" masterminded by independent newspaper The Post Editor Fred M'membe to weaken and undermine public confidence in the Banda government. Kunda claimed that the scheme is a treasonable act against the Penal Code and asserted that the press, civil society and the opposition "want to control State power so they can choose who (sic) to prosecute for them to make money." The following day, Kunda sent a controversial draft media regulation bill reportedly rejected by the Ministry of Information (ref C). President Rupiah Banda did not publicly comment on Kunda's actions while on vacation at his Eastern Province ranch.

[3](#). (C) This episode is only the latest example of Kunda's strident comments that seem to get out in front of the administration. Kunda has repeatedly stirred up controversy during Banda's frequent absences with public attacks against the press, civil society, political opposition, and even the diplomatic community. His public diatribes indicate either that he has become the Banda's point person for delivering harsh messages or that he is prone to wander off the reservation. In either case, we are dubious that he is calling the shots.

[4](#). (C) Kunda was an unexpected and uninspired choice when President Banda named him VP in November 2008 (ref D). Considered lethargic (possibly ill) and semi-competent, Kunda is an unimpressive interlocutor whose personal views are

unclear. Many believe Banda chose him because he posed little political threat. In 2009, Kunda ostensibly joined Banda's inner circle by allying himself with outspoken MMD hardliners: Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services Ronnie Shikapwasha; Home Affairs Minister Lameck Mangani; and Minister of Works and Supply and acting MMD spokesperson Mike Mulongoti. Kunda may be in a tenuous position as a weaker member of this clique given his recent capitulation on his proposed media bill (ref C), and he may at some point be deemed "expendable" by hardliners vying for the political inside lane.

15. (C) Bottom line: Kunda holds little weight in the Cabinet, and Banda may replace him before the 2011 election with someone Banda needs to neutralize or use to secure important constituencies. While Kunda's public statements could claim a measure of credibility, his power and prospects are limited.
KOPLOVSKY